



let's get

SERIOUS about

LIVE *instructor-led* **TRAINING**

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WITH SO MANY MODES OF TRAINING DELIVERY AVAILABLE TO LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (L&D) PROFESSIONALS – ONLINE, BLENDED, SYNCHRONOUS, ASYNCHRONOUS, MOBILE – IT'S COMMON TO ASK WHETHER A TRADITIONAL FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOP IS NECESSARY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE BUSINESS. IN MANY CASES, IT'S NOT. WHEN IT IS, THOUGH, WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE THIS MODE OF DELIVERY WORTH THE INVESTMENT IN TIME AND RESOURCES.

To that end, training professionals spend a lot of time thinking about the needs of adult learners. What some of them do not fully take into account, though, is that the adults with whom they work are not merely "adults." They are Busy People at Work.

These learners have unique perspectives and specific needs. Unlike adults in non-business learning environments, they view training as a job responsibility, important for their work and their advancement, and are very busy. Time spent in training is time away from their regular responsibilities. Understanding and empathy for this type of learner must be the driving forces behind training design and delivery. When they are, trainers earn the trust and good will of their learners. Without trust and good will, learners check out of the process.

Here are five key concepts to keep in mind when designing and delivering training for Busy People at Work.

1 MAKE IT A CONVERSATION

To determine what the live, instructor-led training environment needs to be, let's turn to Stephen Brookfield. In "Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning," Brookfield says face-to-face

learning is a "transactional dialogue," an exchange of information between trainer and learner, not simply the delivery of information. As Brookfield describes it, this dialogue is one in which "comments and contributions of the participants build organically on each other's views and in which alternative viewpoints, differing interpretations, and criticism are elements essential to the encounter."

In other words, what happens between trainer and learner in the classroom shares many characteristics with regular, everyday conversation. It is spontaneous, sometimes non-linear and includes everyone's perspective on what is being learned. Trainers need to prepare for a dialogue in which fundamental questions, pertinent examples and crucial clarifications can be aired and addressed. This conversation is a primary benefit of face-to-face learning.

2 PLAN TO SUCCEED ON TWO LEVELS

Every training conversation (as well as every business meeting, presentation or discussion) works on two levels: There is a business goal and a process goal. In training, the business goal is about reaching learning objectives. For Busy People at Work, this goal is met when the

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learning is clearly relevant to their jobs. If its relevance is not immediately clear, trainers have the responsibility to supply adequate background and context.

The process goal is met when the learning conversation is perceived as efficient and meaningful. If Busy People at Work feel time is being wasted, they grow increasingly impatient, just as they do during a poorly-run business meeting or presentation. It is the trainer's responsibility to make every learner feel the workshop time is well spent.

3 FRAME THE CONVERSATION

At the beginning of a training session, it's important to frame the conversation from the learner's perspective. The frame should give learners a sense of purpose, a sense of direction and a reason to participate in the training. A strong frame has four elements:

Learning Goal:

The learning goal focuses on what learners will be able to do (or do better or more easily) because of what they're learning. This goal should be relevant to their jobs.

Learners' Current Situation:

The current situation acknowledges what learners are feeling and thinking when the workshop begins. Sometimes it has to do

with their perceptions of learning content. Sometimes it has to do with the fact that they are taking time away from their regular responsibilities to be with you. Sometimes it's a combination of several things, both practical and emotional.

Agenda:

The agenda should make the learning that is about to take place clear and easy to follow. No matter how complex learning content might be, the agenda should be simple and make sense to learners.

Benefits:

Focus on both the business goal and the process goal when you describe what learners will gain by the time they leave the class.

It doesn't matter in what order these elements are delivered. It doesn't matter how many slides, if any, are used to deliver them. What matters is that the frame should be delivered clearly and concisely at the beginning of the workshop. Then, as training moves forward, each portion of the class is brought into the frame. (See "Sample Frame.")

4 BE ENGAGED AND RESPONSIVE

An engaged trainer is in the moment and fully capable of responding to what's happening with learners. When trainers

strive for perfection, practice to the point of memorization or follow the facilitator's guide too strictly, they cannot engage in a dialogue.

When trainers are genuinely engaged, they have, as Brookfield says in "The Skillful Teacher," "a consistent awareness of how students are experiencing their learning and perceiving teachers' actions." With that awareness, trainers are able to guide the conversation – in the moment, as it plays out – to keep it relevant and efficient. Reaching this level of engagement isn't easy:

It takes effort to get out of your head and connect with individuals.

Doing so is especially important during the first few minutes of the training session. Don't skirt your responsibility to bring learners into the conversation. Your goal is not to be funny or merely enthusiastic. It is to establish a genuine connection with each person in the room.

It takes awareness and trust.

Trainers need to be aware of what's happening in the room and trust in the conversation taking place. Do things seem to be heading off into the weeds? Maybe that's where the conversation needs to go to address learner concerns. So it's important to know when to loosen the reigns enough to let the conversation go where it needs to go and when it's time to pull it back on track.

SAMPLE FRAME

LEARNING GOAL: "This morning, we'll be talking about the healthcare options available to you. At the end of this session, you will have the information you need to choose the option right for you and your family."

LEARNERS' CURRENT SITUATION: "As new employees, I know you all have a lot on your minds and a lot of other things to worry about, so I'm going to do my best to keep things focused and answer all your questions."

AGENDA: "Here's our agenda for today: First, we'll spend an hour going over all of the benefits available to you. Second, we'll focus on the most important item on the list: the insurance options you have for you and your family."

LEARNER BENEFITS: "When we're through here today, I want you to feel that you've made the best decision about your coverage, that our time together was well spent and that you know you can always come to me with questions about anything we cover today."

BUSY PEOPLE AT WORK

Always remember the people participating in training are more than “adult learners.” They are Busy People at Work – preoccupied with their other work responsibilities and afraid training might be a waste of time.

Too often, well-intentioned instructional design and delivery techniques exacerbate these concerns.

For live, instructor-led training to be worth the investment, learners must feel that what is learned is highly relevant to their jobs and that the learning process itself is efficient. When learners feel this way, trainers earn their trust and good will.

5 DON'T LET ACTIVITIES DESTROY GOOD WILL

Too often, trainers confuse an activity or an ice breaker with engagement. You will not engage Busy People at Work simply because you've asked them to participate in an activity. And you will never engage them by claiming the activity will be “fun.” Activities need to live within the frame of the workshop and pass the “Busy People at Work test.”

Once you've decided a particular exercise or activity has value, see if it passes this test by looking at the activity from the learners' perspective. How much effort, risk and time are they willing to expend for the perceived payoff?

Effort is about more than the difficulty of what you're asking learners to do. It has to do with whether the learner sees value in participating. Simply because you think

it's a good idea to break into triads doesn't mean learners will feel the need to do it. The question you must ask is: Will learners view this exercise as necessary? If not, eliminate or rethink it. And if the exercise is used, make sure learners understand why it will be worthwhile.

Risk is about the fear of failure or embarrassment. Activities destroy trust when they set participants up for failure or cause them to feel uncomfortable in front of the group. If the risk for the activity is high, but its results are beneficial, acknowledge the risk and ease learners into the activity.

Time is the big one. Will learners view an activity as a good use of their time? Will it seem necessary to them? If the answer to these questions is yes, the activity is probably a good idea. If the answer is no, eliminate the activity and find another way to reach your goal.



Remember, learners need to be engaged in the process before the exercise takes place, and the activities themselves should feel appropriate and fit within the frame you established at the beginning of the workshop.

Face-to-face training serves an important business function, one that cannot be achieved through other delivery options. For this type of training to succeed, trainers must accept the fact that their learners are Busy People at Work who weigh relevance, usefulness and efficiency at every turn. It is our responsibility to step up our game to meet their needs and the needs of the business. ☺

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